WHAT PLACE SHOULD FANTASY LITERATURE HOLD IN THE HEART AND MIND OF THE CHILD OF GOD

". . .the Faun began to talk. He had wonderful tales to tell of life in the forest. He told about the midnight dances and how the Nymphs who lived in the wells and the Dryads who lived in the trees came out to dance with the Fauns; . . . and then about summer when the woods were green and old Silenus on his fat donkey would come to visit them. And sometimes Bacchus himself, and then the streams would run with wine instead of water and the whole forest would give itself over to jollification for weeks on end."

(C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* pp. 12, 13)

"That's what I don't understand, Mr. Beaver," said Peter, "I mean isn't the Witch herself human?"

"She'd like us to believe it," said Mr. Beaver, "and it's on that that she bases her claim to the Queen. But she's no daughter of Eve. She comes of your father Adam's —" (here Mr. Beaver bowed) "your father Adam's first wife, her they call Lilith. And she was one of the Jinn. That's what she comes from on one side. And on the other she comes of the giants. No, no there isn't a drop of human blood in the Witch."

(C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* pp. 65, 66.)

Please read over again the above quotes and then tell me if God is present in them. Tell me if God could be the source and subject of them and if, in them He could reveal Himself to man, or through them lead man to Himself.

I will admit, until we received the Winter, 1982, edition of the *Perspectives* I had never read any literature by C.S. Lewis or J.R.R. Tolkein. However, the article "Reading with the Heart. . .The Fantasy Literature of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkein" deeply troubled me and after reading it several times, I felt the need to look into the literature. After reading some of the books of the Chronicles of Narnia, I felt very strongly that I had to write on what I believe to be the truth about fantasy literature.

Before I begin, I would like to ask those of you who have never read fantasy literature to please read this carefully, and those of you who *have* read and enjoyed fantasy literature, to please put all of your previous feelings of the stories out of your mind, and read the facts in this article with the mind and heart of a spiritually sensitive child of God.

God is NOT present in fantasy literature! I think it is basic first of all for us to see what myth is and then look at some quotes of the authors. Myth is a story of unknown origin to serve to explain some practice or belief or natural phenomenon, or story invented as a veiled explanation of a truth, or a person or thing existing only in imagination or whose actuality is not verifiable. Mythopoeic means creating or tending to create myths, and mythopathic means to be affected by myths.

> Lewis had never underestimated the power of myth. Far from it. . . . But he still did not believe in the myths that delighted him. Beautiful and moving though such stories might be, they were (he said) ultimately untrue. . . .
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> No, said Tolkein, They are not lies. . . . To you a tree is simply a vegetable organism, and a star simply a ball of inanimate matter. . . . But the first man to talk of "trees" and "stars" saw things very differently. To them, the world was alive with mythological beings. . . . They saw the sky as a jewelled tent, and the earth as the womb whence all living things have come. . .man is not ultimately a liar. He may pervert his thoughts into lies but he comes from God, and it is from God that he draws his ultimate ideals. . .not merely the abstract thoughts of man but also his imaginative inventions must originate with God, and must in consequence reflect something of eternal truth.
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> What was the point of it all? (Lewis continued) How could the death and resurrection of Christ have "saved the world"?
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> Tolkein answered him immediately. Had he not shown how pagan myths were, in fact, God expressing himself through the minds of poets,. . . Well, then, Christianity (he said) is exactly the same thing – with the enormous difference that the poet who invented it was God Himself, and the images He used were real men and actual history. He (Lewis) enjoyed these stories, "tasted" them, and got something from them that he could not get from abstract argument. Could he not transfer that attitude, that appreciation of STORY, to the life and death of Christ? . . .Could he not realize that it IS a myth and make himself receptive to it? For, Tolkein said, if God is mythopoeic, man must become mythopathic.
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> Twelve days later Lewis wrote. . . . I have just passed from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ.

So we can understand this; Lewis read the gospels, believed them as myth, only true myth because God "created" them, and thus he came to believe in Christ. But *did* he?

> Actually it was not quite so easy or so sudden as that. . . . He had in fact reached the point where rational argument failed, and it became a matter of belief rather than of logical proof. . .(and) Lewis could not go on thinking it over for ever. He realized that some sort of "leap of faith" was necessary to get him over the final hurdle. . . . So he became a Christian.
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> Indeed his doubts about the Christian story never entirely ceased. There were, he remarked, many moments at which he felt "How could I –

I of all people – ever come to believe this cock and bull story?" But this, he felt, was better than the error of taking it all for granted. Nor was he utterly alarmed at the notion that Christianity might after all be untrue. "Even assuming (which I most constantly deny)," he said, "that the doctrines of historic Christianity are merely mythical, it is the myth which is the vital and nourishing element in the whole concern."

(The above two sections of quotes were taken from Humphrey Carpenter's *The Inklings*, pp. 44-47.)

Although I am in no position to question Lewis' Christianity, THIS IS NOT HOW A CHILD OF GOD IS REGENERATED! God never reveals His saving grace to man through any means other than Scripture and the preaching of it. To say anything else is anti-scriptural, as the Confessions tell us.

CONFESSION OF FAITH, ART. II . . ."And secondly He makes Himself more clearly known to us by His Holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation."

So we have found that both Lewis and Tolkein drew heavily from pagan myth in their belief. They also did so in their writing, and believed this is as it should be, for all myths are just a retelling of the Great Story.

This is not so! We cannot in any way tell the glorious gospel truths using idol gods. (See Acts 17:16.)

We have also found that both men believe that myth and fantasy work by triggering in man the recollection and appreciation of truth inherent in all men as they are creatures of God.

This is not so! There is NO recollection or appreciation of truth inherent in unregenerate man, as the Canons make clear to us;

CANONS III & IV, ART. 6 "What therefore neither the light of nature nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the word or ministry of reconciliation: which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old as under the New Testament."

Lewis said that the immediate cause of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was a series of nightmares that he had been having about lions. On a deeper level the story was, he explained, an answer to the question: "What might Christ be like if there really were a world Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in that world as He actually has done in ours?"

(*The Inklings*, p. 223.)

We cannot say that Lewis' creations were placed in his mind by God, neither may we ask, what would Christ be like if. . . . We know Him

through scripture and that is the only way we *may* know Him, other than acknowledging Him through His creation. So, what *are* these stories? They are PAGAN! Their nature is pagan, they have NO spiritual value, and their true power is to draw the minds of our covenant children away from the beautifully clear Word of God and get them involved in mystical episodes to distort their knowledge. Strong statements, I agree, but nevertheless true! What do you think it does to your child's knowledge and understanding of creation when he hears or reads from *The Magician's Nephew* that Aslan (the lion Lewis uses to represent Christ come from another world) starts with an empty world, begins singing beautiful music, sings into being trees and mountains, and then touches noses with some of the animals he sings into being that they may become the Talking Beasts of Narnia – ONLY AFTER:

> The Lion opened his mouth, but no sound came from it; he was breathing out, a long, warm breath; it seemed to sway all the beasts as the wind sways a line of trees. Far overhead from beyond the veil of blue sky which hid them the stars sang again: a pure cold difficult music. Then there came a swift flash like fire (but it burnt nobody) either from the sky or from the Lion itself, and every drop of blood tingled in the children's bodies, and the deepest, wildest voice they ever heard was saying:
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> "Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters."
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> (C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, p. 116.)

This can do nothing but distort and confuse the wonderful truth of creation in the minds and hearts of our children.

To portray Christ as Aslan the Lion, ruler over all Narnia, who continually comes to the aid of the "creatures" of Narnia, and gives his life to save a "Son of Adam" is anti-scriptural. The *only* place we read in scripture of Christ as a Lion is in Revelation 5:5, where the Lion represents Christ, the glorious conquering King. However, when Christ came to sacrifice Himself for His people, He came as the Lamb of God, *not* as a glorious King. Again, the Narnia books completely misrepresent the Son of God.

The second commandment requires that we in no wise represent God by images nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, XXXV, Question and Answer 97 reads: Q.: "Are images then not at all to be made? A. God neither can, nor may be represented by any means, but as to creatures; though they may be represented, yet God forbids to make, or have any resemblance of them, either in order to worship them or to serve God by them."

You wouldn't say that you worship God through fantasy literature,

but when the fantasy books are used to excite one to turn to scripture and thus serve God, we are breaking the second commandment.

But the question then is, why did God inspire the writers of the Bible to use images to describe Him? Listen to what Ursinus has to say in his commentary on the Catechism (p. 526).

"...Solomon had upon his throne images of lions, and had figures of palm trees and cherubims carved upon the walls of the temple by the command of God.... The law does not, therefore, forbid the use of images, but their abuse which takes place when images are made either for the purpose of representing or worshipping God or creatures."

THE MEANING COMES THROUGH CLEARLY: WE MAY NOT USE "ASLAN" TO REPRESENT CHRIST.

Calvin in his *Institutes*, vol. I, makes the following statements: "But God makes no comparison between images as if one were more and another less befitting. He rejects, without exception, all shapes and pictures, and other symbols by which the superstitious imagine they can bring Him near to them" (p. 91). "It is said that the images are not accounted gods. Nor were the Jews so utterly thoughtless as not to remember that there was a God whose hand led them out of Egypt before they made the calf. Indeed Aaron saying that these were the gods which had brought them out of Egypt, they intimated, in no ambigious terms, that they wished to retain God, their deliverer, provided they saw Him going before them in the calf" (p. 98).

Just one more thing about images. God *did* inspire His saints to reveal Him through word images of nature: snow, summer, mountains, chickens, etc., *but* that does not mean that *we* have a freedom to do *whatever we want* with images. Notice the snow in scripture. To show us how our sins are covered, it *remains snow.* In order to show us that Christ is the Solid Rock, the mountain remains a mountain, exactly as God created it. The truth of Christ and His church is pictured in marriage only as long as that marriage remains what God ordained it to be. Thus it is that a lion talking, appearing and disappearing many times, living over a period of thousands of years, and dying and coming back to life again is not at all the imagery that God inspired the writers of scripture to use. It is a portrayal of Christ that is not permitted. Perhaps if we used the might of the lion as a picture of the power and might of Christ it would be different, but to give to the lion a multitude of capabilities that it was not created with in order to be a representation of Christ is blasphemy, and comes terribly close to what the children of Israel did with the golden calf.

In the Protestant and Orthodox Center at the New York World's

Fair in 1964, there was shown a movie entitled "The Parable" in which a very sad clown portrayed Christ. The clown began to take over the work of other members of the circus, began taking on more and more of their problems, their disgraces, their suffering, and finally died the death one of them deserved. The purpose of the film (which was without dialogue) was explained in a pamphlet which was distributed on the way out of the auditorium. It was to draw the viewers closer to the realization of what Christ did for them and to have them re-evaluate the meaning of their own lives. Blasphemous? Yes! What I am trying to say is that it is no less blasphemous to portray Christ as a talking, laughing, playing, miracle-performing lion!!!

> One reason for Lewis' holding back from conversion for so long was his inability to find the Gospel story attractive. It evoked none of the imaginative response that was aroused in him by pagan myths. As he told Greeves, "the spontaneous appeal of the Christian story is so much less to me than that of Paganism." This was perhaps one reason why he now began to create his own fictional setting for Christianity.
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> (*The Inklings,* p. 47.)

If we have to use crutches such as fantasy literature to become excited about reading scripture, if we have to use fantasy literature to enable us to see anew the awesome power and earth-moving importance of scriptural events, if it gives us a better understanding and appreciation of God's Holy infallible scripture, then we are no better than the children of Israel in the wilderness. If, as fallen people in a fallen world, we need all the help we can get, there is a dire lack in our regeneration and we have a very weak Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts, which, thank God, we do not.

What we have already seen is more than enough to make us turn away from these books (and by the way, remove them from our school libraries). But there is still much to consider.

We are told often from our pulpits, and rightfully so, that we must not use euphemisms, that when we do, we are transgressing the third commandment. Yet in recommending the Narnia series to our children, we are condoning such words as goodness gracious, Lord love you, By Jove, By heaven, Golly, I thank my lucky stars, Gawd, and such talk as a dem fine woman, and don't be such an ass.

It is through the names of God that we know Him. By His names He is revealed to us. "Jesus" tells us that He saves, "Christ" tells us that He is anointed by God, etc. What does Aslan mean? May we just pick a name and ascribe it to a "representative" of the Son of God?

Aslan comes and goes as he wills in Narnia. There is, of course, no

incarnation, no humiliation in life, a death for another with shed blood, but no cross, no burial, no rejection by the "Great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea" (the series description of God the Father), and a coming back to life at the next sunrise that so closely resembles and yet mutilates the resurrection of Jesus that it makes one cringe.

Now there may be those of you who feel that I have gone into the books to find every example of blasphemy that I could find. I will admit that I did look carefully for mis-representations of God and Jesus Christ. Can't we then just give the books to our children and let them read them for enjoyment, for what they get out of them, or read the books to them without explaining anything to them? In other words can't the books be read as any other imaginative story? NO!

In the same issue of the *Perspectives*, there is an article on "Teaching Young Children Wise Choices in Literature," by Mrs. Gertrude Hoeksema. After giving some basics of what our children should read, the article gives us several "yardsticks for rejecting, (or using caution with) poorer books." I have found that the Chronicles of Narnia fail at least three of these areas and are therefore unsuitable literature for our covenant children.

The first area is that of distorted art. Mrs. Hoeksema writes concerning the Dr. Seuss and Syd Hoff books, "We may not laugh at distortions of God's creation. It is what the wicked always do. When our covenant children get their hands on these books, they do it too."

Granted, Lewis may not have written of Fauns (half man, half goat), centuars (half horse, half man), bulls with man's heads, and Dryads (the living part of trees) for laughter, but they *are* distortions of God's wonderful creation and the artwork in the books adds to the problem. God created man in His own image, and horses for their own purpose, and trees for their own. We may not distort God's creation the way Lewis has.

The second area of poorer books we are warned about is that of those presenting a pseudo-religion – "those that never mention any worship of the Lord, nor a God-fearing walk. . . ." Now the Chronicles of Narnia are highly praised by many as books that give us a desire to look more into scripture. *However*, in the books I read; never do the children go to church, the Sabbath day is not mentioned, the children are on their own and never in a covenant family relationship. No mention is made of devotions or prayer (beyond "In the name of Aslan" or "Aslan, Aslan, Aslan"), and never is the Bible mentioned, that I read of, except *perhaps* the wonderful Book Lucy read in the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which among cures for warts, a spell to

make oneself beautiful, how to call up wind, and how to give a man an ass's head, contained a story about a cup, a sword, and a tree, and a green hill. It is very clear that these books do fall under the category of pseudo-religious.

The last area of poorer books is that of those containing idolatry. There is just no way of getting around the fact that some of the characters C.S. Lewis uses in his books are taken strictly from pagan myth, and are idol gods. He even goes so far as to make the gods good characters; demi-men, fauns, dryads, and worst of all, he makes Bacchus himself, the Greek wine god, a friendly acquaintance of "Aslan." In one instance in *Prince Caspian,* Aslan becomes surrounded by tree women who shout Aslan, Aslan, and then they begin dancing and that's when Bacchus and his friend Silenus come and dance too, and soon there are grape vines growing all over the people and creatures, and everyone begins eating grapes, more than anyone could possibly want. ". . .and no table manners at all. One saw sticky and stained fingers everywhere, and, though mouths were full, the laughter never ceased. . . ."

Remember, Aslan is supposed to represent Christ, and here we see him having a good time with a Greek wine god and "his wild women." This is very dangerous reading for our children!

I am firmly convinced, after looking into several of the Narnia books, that rather than reading this literature with the heart, we must reject it with the heart. God is not in this literature, and I am convinced that God does not use this literature to the benefit of His children. It is of our sinful nature that we desire more than He has given in His Word. He has blest us richly in giving us His Word, and we can understand it and appreciate it more and more by reading it more and more.

I Timothy 1:4 "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies which minister questionings, rather than godly edifying which is in faith."

II Peter 1:16, 17 "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

It is hard enough in these last days to lead our children along the right paths. Let us all, parents and teachers, work hard to keep the minds of our covenant children free from *any* mis-representation of

Christ, His Word, salvation, heaven, and the walk of the child of God, and continue to feed them the Bread of Life and streams of living water.

Hebrews 12:1, 2 "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Barb Dykstra

RESPONSE TO "READING WITH THE HEART"

After reading the article "Reading with the Heart," in the 1982, winter *Perspectives* I am very concerned and alarmed. I believe that Brother VanDerSchaaf is in error on many key points and cherishes these fantasy stories to the point that he is forcing them into a Biblical framework into which they will never fit.

On page 20, Mr. VanDerSchaaf in reply to his own question of why God is in fantasy stories states "Because in writing good fantasy, man is retelling a myth, and God is the source and subject of all great myth. What is God doing in a fantasy story? He is revealing Himself to man. He is leading man to Himself." Almighty God does not use myth to lead man to Himself, God only uses Scripture and creation. Romans 10:17 "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Lewis and Tolkien both draw heavily from the pagan mythology which the apostle Paul condemns as idolatry. How then can Lewis and Tolkien combine Christ with Belial, yoke together righteousness and unrighteousness? II Corinthians 6:16, "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" Mr. VanDerSchaaf goes on to show us that "high" fantasy literature is a Christian endeavor by paralleling metaphors and anthropomorphic language used in Holy Scripture with that of fantasy. Let us turn to Isaiah 40:18, "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare Him?" How dare anyone contrast the Second Person of the Trinity with a half-animal, half-human, wizard, hobbit, or a talking lion! Blasphemy against the Most Holy One. God is a consuming fire and a jealous God and will punish